

► Forty-seven cattle producers participated in the 2007 Young Cattlemen's Conference, conducted by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NCBA

An Industry Education

An Illinois Angus producer
learns about the beef industry through
NCBA's influential Young Cattlemen's Conference.

by *Crystal Albers*

When Chad Hoffman heard about the Young Cattlemen's Conference (YCC), he knew it was an opportunity he couldn't pass up.

"I had a good friend go on the trip two years ago, Chad Ellingson from North Dakota, and I got to visiting with him about the trip and thought, 'You know, that sounds like something that I'd like to do,'" Hoffman says.

But family life came first for the Colfax, Ill., producer. Hoffman's wife, Janelle, was pregnant with their second child and due approximately during the following year's YCC. So he waited patiently until the next year to apply to the Angus Foundation for sponsorship.

It proved to be a “once-in-a-lifetime experience,” he says.

A priceless education

Born and raised on an Angus cow-calf operation, Hoffman developed an early love for Angus cattle on the family’s Hoffman Angus farm, which was founded in 1962. Involvement in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), 4-H and FFA coupled that passion with an interest in agricultural leadership. Now an area sales representative for Genex Cooperative Inc., Hoffman saw the YCC as a chance to develop both pursuits.

“Basically, NCBA (National Cattlemen’s Beef Association) takes you through every aspect of the beef industry, from pasture to plate,” he says about the conference. “Along the way, you get quite an education on everything from seedstock to lobbying in Washington.”

The annual eight-day event is conducted by NCBA, with additional sponsorship from state and breed affiliates, Tyson Fresh Meats Inc., Five Rivers Ranch Cattle Feeding LLC and John Deere. Nominated participants go on a comprehensive, nationwide tour of various industry sectors, all with a goal of enhancing leadership skills and beef industry knowledge in young cattle producers.

The intensive tour schedule, spanning May 31-June 7, wasn’t for the faint of heart, but it was well worth a few sleepless hours, Hoffman says.

“The people are mostly what makes it a wonderful trip. You start with 47 people that get thrown into a room. You don’t know any of them, and they come from all across the country,” he says. “By the time you go through NCBA’s whole workshop and their training, you come out the other end with 47 new best friends, a greater respect for the beef industry, and a tremendous amount of knowledge. And you’ve traveled thousands and thousands of miles in a week’s time.”

Having previously met only one of the participants, Hoffman began his travels with 46 others at NCBA headquarters in Denver, Colo. There, the group received an organizational overview of the association and its management team. Participants also reviewed current projects funded by the beef checkoff, as well as NCBA member benefits, quality assurance (QA) programs and beef cutting demonstrations. Five Rivers Ranch Cattle Feeding presented an industry case study, and Cattle-Fax conducted an industry outlook session. The group also heard a retailer’s point of view, learned about branded beef marketing efforts, and received media training.

“I didn’t have a lot of knowledge before I went on this trip about NCBA, who they are,



► Hoffman (left) says by the time participants complete the YCC, they “come out the other end with 47 new best friends, a greater respect for the beef industry, and a tremendous amount of knowledge.”

what they did,” Hoffman says. “After being on the trip, it just amazes me how much they do and how little credit they take for doing it. They come up with new cuts of meat like the flat-iron steak, but I bet if you asked 10 cattlemen where the flat iron came from, they couldn’t tell you. That’s how NCBA works. They work for their members without taking any credit.”

From Denver, the group traveled to Ulysses, Kan., to tour Grant County Feeders and its 112,000-head-capacity feedlot. Hoffman was impressed with the magnitude of the operation and its extensive feedmill.

“Coming from a cow-calf background, we just don’t have any large feedlots like that in Illinois,” he says. “They had 15 miles of bunks to feed 112,000 head three times a day.”

Tyson Fresh Meats’ South Sioux City, Neb., facility served as the next stop, offering what Hoffman says was a “clean, organized facility where everything was white and spic and span.” From there, participants toured an associated hide tannery before traveling to Chicago, Ill., to tour the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME). There, they received a firsthand view of the trading floor and met with CME senior management. Tour-goers then visited the Bruss Co., a product fabrication facility, before leaving for Washington, D.C.

Real-life Washington

Hoffman says his biggest education came in Washington, D.C.

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A unique opportunity

Chad Hoffman, Colfax, Ill., producer and the 2007 American Angus Association representative to the Young Cattlemen’s Conference (YCC), says, “It’s hard to explain to somebody how wonderful this trip is until you go on it; it’s hard to get the full effect.”

So Hoffman suggests producers do just that — apply to the Angus Foundation for sponsorship. The not-for-profit organization began sponsoring a representative of the Angus breed to YCC in 2003.

Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president, says they usually receive about half a dozen applications annually. He says the YCC helps Angus breeders better understand the complexity of issues and challenges the beef industry faces.

“One of three programmatic areas of emphasis of the Angus Foundation’s mission is education, and YCC provides us a wonderful avenue to help educate Angus breeders about the beef industry and its numerous facets from production all the way to the consumer,” Jenkins says. “Our number of YCC participants continues to expand, and this investment will pay dividends for the Angus breed and beef industry many years into the future.”

Hoffman thanked Jenkins and the Angus Foundation as well as the American Angus Association Board of Directors for the opportunity to attend the event. “I would encourage all young Angus members to fill out an application, because this is definitely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”

Interested individuals in the 2008 YCC have until Friday, Jan. 4, 2008, to submit applications to the Angus Foundation by the postmark deadline. Applications can be downloaded from the Angus Foundation’s web site beginning Oct. 1, 2007.

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"I got the Potomac bug. I loved it out there," he says.

Participants received an issues briefing from Congressman Todd Tiahrt (R-Kan.), followed by a Farm Bill briefing from Bryan Dierlam, a staff member with the House of Representatives Agriculture Committee. NCBA public policy staff members also addressed the group prior to a Beef Caucus Picnic at Taft Memorial Park near the U.S. Capitol. Hoffman and the other YCC participants then earned the chance to visit with their respective Congressional leaders.

"Growing up, you see Washington just on a TV set, and just to be able to go and feel it, touch it, experience it, was wonderful," he says. "I felt very comfortable talking to the senators and congressmen about the issues that were relevant to the beef industry."

Relevant topics at the time included the horse slaughter ban and funding for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) offered through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Hoffman notes. Free and equitable agricultural trade was also discussed among many of the cattlemen and legislators.

"It's not as gray as what people think it is," he says. "It's pretty well black and white. You have to stand up for what you believe in and what you want because nobody else will."

That sentiment struck a chord with Hoffman, who says he plans to use his newfound perspective in day-to-day operations.

"I learned you have to be active in what you believe in," he says. "We're going to have to have people fight for agriculture and the beef industry, or we're not going to have one."

Hoffman notes the concerted effort to keep beef off the center of the plate by poorly educated consumer-advocate groups. To fight the well-funded, yet ill-advised onslaught of anti-agriculture messages, he suggests producers do their part in educating others about the real story behind the beef industry.

In that vein, Tres Bailey, Wal-Mart manager of federal government relations, gave an overview of food policies that were being addressed in Washington.

The group also met with representatives from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — including Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns and Daniel Heath, special assistant to the undersecretary of rural development — for an overview of USDA's role in animal identification (ID), trade negotiations and the Farm Bill. Hunter Moorehead, special assistant to the President for agriculture, trade and food; and David Anderson, associate director for natural resource programs, provided participants with a White House briefing.

Whitstone Farms, an Aldie, Va., Angus seedstock operation, gave participants insight into the seedstock sector of the industry while providing a chance to unwind with a tour, barbeque and live entertainment.



►Chad Hoffman, Colfax, Ill., Angus breeder, served as this year's American Angus Association representative to the YCC. Hoffman says the experience was invaluable.

Take-home lessons

Hoffman says he took many lessons from the weeklong, whirlwind trip, adding, "the contacts made were invaluable.

"The volume of experiences that you get within a week and the relationships that you make are priceless," he says. "After you spend about 10 intense days with all these people, they kind of become family. The relationships that you make continually build once you get back home and get back to your regular life."

Hoffman says it's also important to build the next generation of young leaders.

"We need to continue to develop our young leaders to keep our industry viable and sustainable, because we want Angus to lead the beef industry."

To do that you have to be active, he says.

"You can't sit on the sidelines. Whether you're an Angus breeder and you're active in the American Angus Association or you're involved in NCBA, you need to be involved and stand up for what you want. If you don't, someone else is going to get their way."

Hoffman says producers can start at any level. "You can write and call your state or U.S. congressman. You can talk to the Board of Directors of the American Angus Association, NCBA, anybody that can listen. Some will give you more time than others, but be active, and be persistent."



►Participants toured the Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), where they received firsthand experience on the trading floor and met CME senior management.